

Little Patron of Gardeners

The Good Saint Fiacc



Story by Catherine Beebe
Pictures by Robb Beebe



Fiachra loved each Season

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LONGMANS, GREEN & CO.

NEW YORK

LONDON • TORONTO

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

114 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK
221 EAST 20TH STREET, CHICAGO
88 TREMONT STREET, BOSTON

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO. LTD.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C. 4
CHITTARANJAN AVENUE, CALCUTTA
53 NICOL ROAD, BOMBAY
36A MOUNT ROAD, MADRAS

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

215 VICTORIA STREET, TORONTO

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LITTLE PATRON OF GARDENERS

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FIRST EDITION

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO., INC.

NEW YORK

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

LITTLE PATRON OF GARDENERS

I

FIACHRA WAS A GAEL

THIS is the story of a little boy who lived so many years ago that we can hardly count them. The time was about six hundred years after Our Lord was born. This little boy who lived so far away in time was named Fiachra; that is to say, as a little boy his name was Fiachra. When he grew up his name was changed to Fiacre. But how that came to be is part of his story.

To us, Fiachra is a strange name, but it was not at all strange to his playmates. Fiachra was a real boy just like any of the boys you know. Of course in that far-off time and far-away country he did not dress the same as boys of today. He did not speak as we do now because he used the language of his own country. But in all else he was quite like other boys. He ate and slept; he ran and walked; he

worked and played. He cried and laughed, and no doubt shouted too, when there was something to shout about, just as you do.

Fiachra was born in Ireland and like all the people who lived in Ireland at that time he was known as a Gael. His native language was Gaelic.

Because Fiachra lived so long ago not a great deal is known about him. Histories were not written at that time as they are today. There were very few books and there were no printing presses. Each book that was made had to have every word carefully 'copied by hand, so it took a very long time to make them. Not many people could own books and not many could read them. So because only very learned men could read and write, stories of people and places were told rather than written. Sometimes two people might tell the same story, and without meaning to, change it just a little. So, from many stories has come this story of little Saint Fiacre.

Fiachra's home was a large one, for his father was a ruler of many people. In those days people built the huts which were their homes close to their ruler. Cruel tribes went about the country fighting battles and trying to force other tribes to follow their warlike leaders, so for safety and pro-



Fiachra was quite like other boys

tection the peace-loving people lived close to their chieftain.

They did not want war. They wanted to farm their lands, and to take care of their cattle and their pigs and their sheep. They wanted to make their clothes from the sheep's wool and from the flax that they grew. They wanted to be with their families and to work and to pray and to learn.

They cut down great trees in their forests and built strong fences with them. These fences were to keep out their enemies and to protect their lands.

Their enemies were pagans or people who do not believe in God. The pagans came not only to destroy the homes and capture the people, but also to tear down their churches and kill their priests.

The peace-loving people believed in God. They had great faith and prayed for strength to defend themselves and all that was dear to them. They fought bravely against their enemies and sometimes they won and made prisoners of the pagans. Sometimes these captured pagans listened to the stories of Our Lord and His Church and God gave them the grace to believe. When they became Christians there was great rejoicing.

The time was to come when there would be no pagans in



They cut down trees and built fences

Ireland, and it was to be a Christian country. But that was not to happen during Fiachra's life.

Fiachra's father was a kindly chieftain. Within his gates his people went quietly about doing their daily work. The men planted the fields and threshed the grain. They took care of the cattle and the pigs and the sheep.

Fiachra liked to help. Sometimes he grew very tired because the work was hard and he was only a little boy. But then young Fiachra had learned to ask God's help in all that he did. So of course Our Lord did not let him get too tired.



The people went about their work

II

THE BOY GARDENER

FIACHRA liked best of all to dig in the warm brown earth. He loved the green of growing things. At planting time he followed the men into the fields, asking many questions and watching carefully all that they did. Sometimes the older men would say, "Let Fiachra sow the seed. Then the grain will surely ripen."

It did seem so. For whatever Fiachra planted had a way of growing unusually well. Perhaps it was because he always asked God to bless his seed. Fiachra loved Our Lord so dearly that he never did anything without asking His help.

Fiachra not only helped with the planting but he worked with the men preparing the land for the seeds. He kept the weeds from choking the young and tender plants. His joy was great when the time came to gather the fruit and vege-



Whatever Fiachra planted grew well

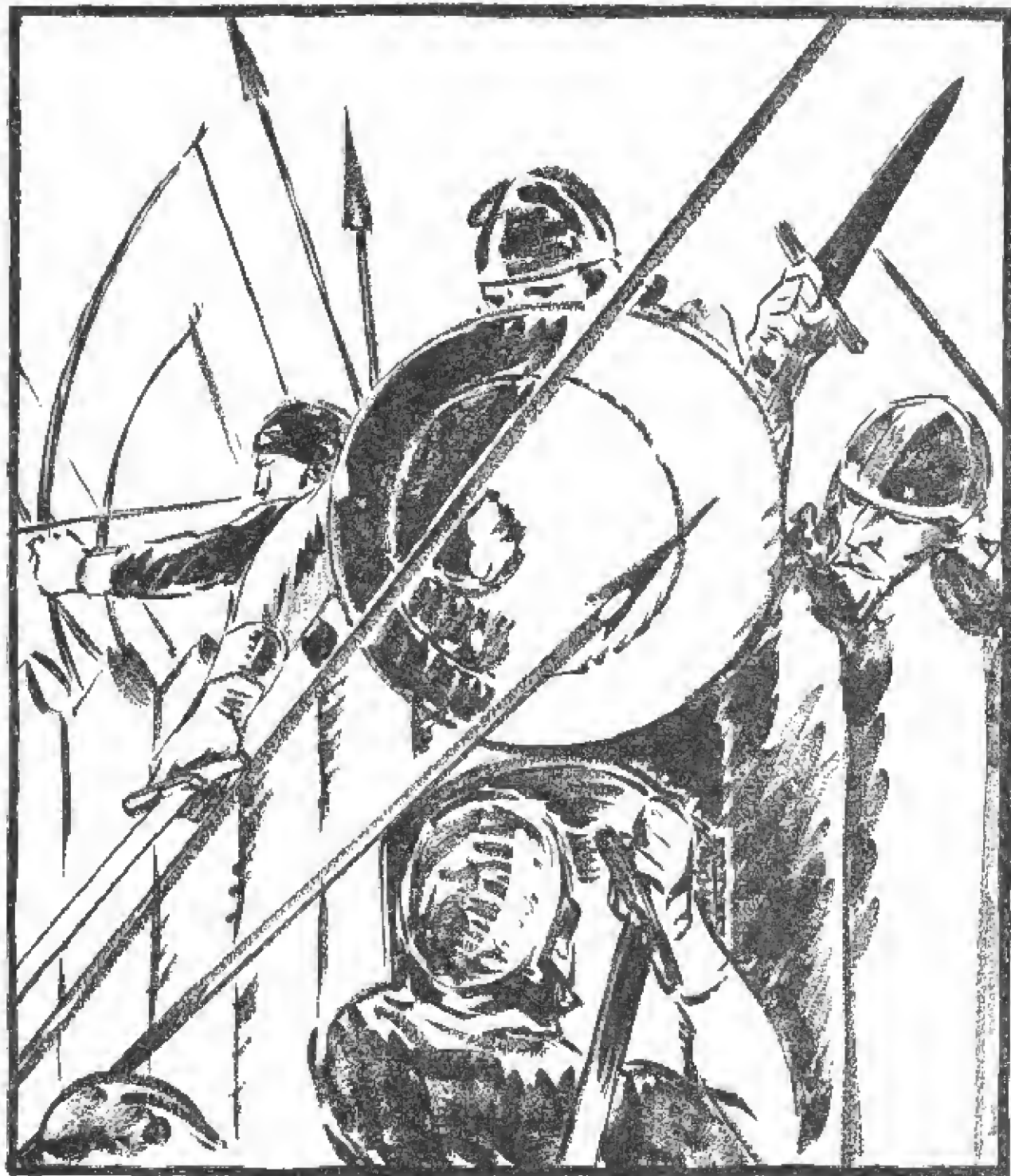
tables he had helped to raise. For Fiachra had a true love of the soil and great skill in gardening.

But Fiachra did not work all the time. He played, too. The boys in those days played games of war. They brandished spears and charged about on pretend horses. They hid from each other and found each other, shouting and running at their games, not unlike the boys of today.

Fiachra did not like the games of war. He did not like the flashing spears or the sound of marching soldiers. The sight of his father riding off to battle filled him with sadness. Soldiers fighting in the fields made him cry out in sorrow. How could they trample the beautiful, ripening grain? How could the soldiers kill men and sheep and cattle and horses? War was cruel. Little Fiachra hated the sights and sounds of battle.

When the enemy had been conquered and quiet had returned, Fiachra would follow his father and his men into the fields to see what damage had been done. His heart was sad to see in his garden the deep marks of the horses' hoofs. He bent lovingly over his little plants. He tried to mend their broken stems. But he could not mend them for their roots, too, had been crushed by cruel and angry men.

"Why could they not be careful?" thought the little gar-



Fiachra hated the sounds of battle

dener. "Why must they fight? Why must there be enemies? Why can not all men be friends?"

The patient, loving care he had given his garden had been wasted. He must begin all over again. His tears fell as he knelt in the fields. He prayed for peace. He prayed that the gardens and fields would not again be spoiled by battle. He prayed that men would love one another.

So Fiachra never joined with the other little boys in their games of war. When his playmates would call, "Come along, Fiachra. You may be the chieftain of our tribe," Fiachra would go running off toward the forest, calling back, "Not now. I have a deep hole to dig. I must bury treasure."

He loved the quiet peacefulness of the forest as much as he hated the sounds of battle. He liked to gather early spring flowers. In summer, he liked to listen to the songs of the birds and to hear the hum of the bees. In autumn he liked to gather the bright-colored leaves and to watch the wise little squirrels storing acorns for the winter. Fiachra loved each season, the winds and the rain, the snow and the sun. They filled him with loving thoughts of the Lord Who made all things.



Fiachra's garden had been destroyed

WILIT THE MONKS TAUGHT FIACHRA

FIACHRA had lessons to learn. The schools in those days were not like ours, and not all children went to school. But because Fiachra was the son of a ruler he had to learn many things, for the time would come when he too would be a ruler. He would one day take his father's place. People in those days were taught by monks, who, besides saying Mass and hearing the confessions of the people, were the teachers of the tribes. Usually they lived in a little hut close to the house of the ruler, so it was to a kindly monk that Fiachra went every day to learn to read and write. He was taught to make beautiful letters and to read stories of Our Lord.

He was also taught the laws of the tribe, how to measure land, and which herbs to use for medicine for the sheep and pigs and cattle should they become sick. The animals needed



People were taught by monks

good care because they furnished food and clothing for all the people of the tribe.

Fiachra's father was proud of his boy because he studied hard and did well with his lessons. Sometimes holy monks of great learning came as visitors to Fiachra's home. Then all the people of the tribe were called together under the wide-flung branches of a tall oak tree. There they listened while the monks told of the work they were doing as they journeyed through Ireland, telling people of Our Lord and Our Faith, teaching people to love God and to serve Him.

Fiachra always sat as near as he could to these learned visitors. He wanted to hear every word they said. It was all so interesting: the stories about Ireland and the stories about far-off lands, too. Fiachra often wished that he could go with the good monks. How he would love to travel far! How he would love to carry the word of God! But he was just a little boy; for the present he must stay at home and work and study.

The words of these learned men filled Fiachra with a great desire to serve God in some special way. He prayed fervently to Jesus and His Blessed Mother, begging them to show him what to do. One day one of the learned men told of a monastery in Meaux in France. The story of the monks



Fiachra sat as near as he could

who served God quietly with prayer and fasting and good works in that monastery filled Fiachra with longing to go to such a peaceful place. Of course he was too young to leave his parents, but often in the quiet stillness of his beloved forest he dreamed his dream of going to the distant monastery.

At last when he was about eighteen years old he told his father of his wish. His father had dreamed his dream of a son who would one day take his place as the ruler of the tribe. But now he realized that those hopes were not to be fulfilled.

The great chieftain placed his hands upon the young boy's shoulders. "My son," he said, "if you have heard the call of God you must go to answer Him. My heart is sad to have you go so far. Your mother, too, would keep you near to her. But go, I say. It is not for us to question the ways of the Lord or to keep you from answering His call. Go, my son and our blessings go with you."



In the quiet of the forest

IV

FIACHRA GOES TO FRANCE

IT IS told that Fiachra prepared for his holy calling in his own country. When at last he was made a priest he began his long journey to France.

In those days there were no automobiles or streamlined trains. There were no airplanes or fast moving steamships. Men traveled on foot and on horseback. It took months and sometimes years to travel distances that today we can cover in a few hours.

Fiachra rode and walked long weary miles until he came to the edge of the water which separated his land from the country to which he was going. In a crude little sailboat not much bigger than the rowboats of today, Fiachra came at last through the stormy waves to France.

France was to be his home. He would no longer be called Fiachra; the language of France was not the same as the



Travel was on foot and on horseback

language of Ireland. In France he was to be called Fiacre. In France Fiacre was to find the peace for which he so longed.

At that time, while Ireland was troubled by warring tribes, France was enjoying a rest from fighting. The people could go about their daily work without fear. They could build their homes and schools. They could plant their gardens. They could work and learn and pray. The bishops were their shepherds and the people were their flocks. The rulers allowed the bishops and people of religion to build churches and monasteries where men were taught those things which they could in turn pass on to others.

Missionaries were sent out from the monasteries to teach people about God and how to serve Him. They went about doing good works: they fed the hungry; they clothed the poor; they took care of the sick. Holy men who wanted to pray quietly and to fast and do penance were allowed to build huts in the forest. Here they could be alone with God.

It was to this land of peace that Fiacre came and his long journey was ended. Weary and lonely, Fiacre came at last to the monastery at Meaux. The great Abbot of the monastery welcomed the young man.

“My son,” he said, “we have heard much of your country. Holy men have come before you from your land to ours.



They fed and clothed the poor

They have told us of the goodness and the holiness of your people. We welcome you here in the service of God."

"I thank you, good Father," said Fiacre. "If you will but tell me how best I may serve Almighty God, I will obey."

"Go to the forest in Breuil," said the Abbot. "There mark off as much land as can be covered in one day. Upon this chosen ground build a place of prayer. Good works and prayer and fasting must fill your every hour."

"I go at once!" said Fiacre. He was eager and filled with joy. At last his prayer was answered. He was to serve God in a special way. "My place of prayer I shall build in honor of our Blessed Lady," he said. "There I will offer to God my every thought and word and deed. There my prayers shall rise to Him for the souls of all mankind."

"Go, my son," said the Abbot. "My blessing be upon you."



The Abbot welcomed him

FIACRE THE GARDENER

FIACRE marked off his land in the deep, still forest. There he built his place of prayer in honor of our Blessed Mother. The little boy who had loved the peaceful forest near his home was now a man, but the love of the forest was still strong within him. His love for the good, brown earth had not left him. He made the land around his place of prayer beautiful with gardens. His fruits and vegetables were the finest.

The news of Fiacre's wonderful gardens spread to great distances. People came from far and near, some in hunger, some in sickness, some in sorrow. No one went away in hunger; no one went away without comfort. For the good Fiacre fed them, and cured them, and blessed them. The boy who had been just a boy like other boys was becoming a saint. For saints were not always saints. By good works



He still loved the brown earth

and deep love of God, and a true desire to please Him, even a little boy or girl can become a great saint. So the little boy Fiachra was to become the good Saint Fiacre.

Miracles took place in Fiacre's garden. People who were suffering in pain and sickness were cured when Fiacre laid his hands upon them. Fiacre lived for many years in the forest at Breuil, working long hours in his garden, praying and fasting long hours in his room.

The boy Fiacre grew old in the service of God. A wise and gentle gardener, this holy man, who showed the same patience and tenderness to souls that he, as a little boy gardener, showed for his crushed and broken plants.

In the year 670 he died, and later he was canonized a saint by Holy Mother Church.

Saint Fiacre is known as the Patron of Gardeners. But he is claimed as their Patron, by cab drivers, too, because the first public cab in France was named for him. In France, cabs were called *fiacres*.

Perhaps you would like to hear the story that is told about how French cabs came to be called *fiacres*.

The little garden saint was very much loved by the people of France. During his good life and after his death many



Miracles took place in Fiacre's garden

miracles were performed by him. Because he was so well loved, pictures of him were painted and in his honor statues of him were made. People were reminded of the little saint when they saw his pictures and his statues, and they prayed to him and kept his memory in their hearts. Among the many people who kept in their hearts the memory of Saint Fiacre, was an innkeeper in Paris. The innkeeper had such a great love for the Patron of Gardeners that he named his inn after him and above the door of his inn he placed a statue of Saint Fiacre.

Business at the little inn was quite good, but not good enough to take care of all the needs of the innkeeper and his family. The innkeeper was troubled; he must have more money for his growing needs. What could he do? How could he earn more money? He could not leave his inn to work in the fields. As he stood in his doorway beneath the good Saint Fiacre he thought and prayed. He asked Our Lord to help him and to show him how to help his family.

Suddenly his eyes turned to his horses standing idly in his stable.

“I have it!” he exclaimed. “I have it!”

He was very excited and happy. He had thought of a way to help his family and to help strangers, too.



Above the door a statue of St. Fiacre

“I cannot leave my inn to work but my good horses shall go out to work for me. I will lend my horses and carriage to people who have none, to people who are visiting in Paris and have not their own horses and carriage with them. Of course they will pay me for their use. I must have money to feed my horses, and to pay my driver. I must have money to keep my carriage clean and in good order, and for my service in lending them.”

That was the beginning of the first livery stable. It was in the year 1640 that for the first time people in Paris could hire carriages.

The news traveled fast. It was not long before people knew that at the Inn of Saint Fiacre they could hire a carriage. “Come,” they would say to their friends, “let us go to the Inn of Saint Fiacre. There we can hire a carriage.”

After a while, perhaps thinking of the Saint Fiacre above the door, they might say, “Come, let us go to the Saint Fiacre for a carriage.” Finally, Saint Fiacre and the carriage came so close together in their thoughts that when they were in a great hurry to get the carriage, they might think only of Fiacre and say, “Let us go to Fiacre for a carriage.” Then at last they probably said, “Let us go for a fiacre.”



They hired carriages at the St. Fiacre

Of course the cab drivers love and honor the good Saint Fiacre. But we who have gardens or would plant gardens like, most of all, to think of Saint Fiacre the Gardener. Our thoughts go back to the little boy who loved the green of growing things and the quiet peacefulness of the forest. We think of the little boy who worked so patiently and lovingly in his own garden. Then our thoughts turn to the little boy grown to manhood. We think of him working among his flowers and vegetables. We see him rise from his work in his garden to welcome those who came to him for comfort and help.

Saint Fiacre's feast is on August 30th. It is well that his feast day comes at the end of summer when all the flowers in the garden are at their best and brightest. They are happy to pay honor to the patron of all gardeners.

In the spring, when you dig in the earth, think of the little boy Fiachra. He too liked to dig. When you plant your seeds ask him to watch over them. When the little sprouts show green beg Fiacre to protect them. When the fruits and flowers and vegetables are ready to harvest, gather them joyously. Offer them through the good Saint Fiacre to Our Lord and His Mother.

For Saint Fiacre was their well-loved gardener.



Our thoughts go back

